

THE
Bridge
COURSE

THE BRIDGE STUDY

Welcome to the Bridge Study!

This study is designed to help you hold onto all that you learned in the Bridge Course but also build on it by learning to study the Bible for yourself. This can feel like a big transition, like moving from eating what someone else prepares to learning to cook for yourself. But we'll learn together as we consider four areas that are essential to the Christian life: the church, the gospel, the Bible, and prayer.

In each session of this booklet, you'll read about a topic and answer a few questions that you'll then discuss with your group when you meet. Although the format is different from the Bridge Course, you'll find the same encouraging community around you.

Do you want to experience the joy and fullness that God offers through his Word? Let's get started.

STUDY I

The Importance of the Gospel

We talked a lot about the message of the gospel in the Bridge Course. The word gospel means good news, and it's actually the best news in the word.

In your own words, describe the message of the gospel. Why do you think it is important?

The gospel is a profound but simple message. To understand it, we must first understand our problem. In the first few pages of the Bible, we see man and woman in an unbroken, delightful relationship with God. But they disregarded God's commands, and that perfect relationship was ruined and broken. The "fall," as it is sometimes called, affects us all, and this is why we need the gospel.

Sin isn't just disobeying God or breaking his commandments. It is a poison that has corrupted our nature. That's why sin affects every area of our lives. In Romans 3:10-12, Paul paints a pretty bleak picture. He says, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

To truly understand our sin, we have to understand God's holiness. God is morally perfect and righteous and pure. He is untainted by sin and evil and overflowing with goodness and holiness. This is why he must respond to our sin with wrath (Romans 1:18). This is not an old fashioned idea; it is essential to who God is. And it highlights the great problem that we all face. How can sinners be reconciled to a holy God? What is the solution?

"God is not only holy, he is more loving than we can fathom." At infinite cost to himself, God sent his only son to absorb the wrath and punishment we

deserved. Jesus, who was fully man and fully God, was born into this world through the virgin Mary. Being fully God he has the authority to forgive sins; being fully man, he was able to represent us and die for our sins. He was able to take our place and become our substitute. At the heart of the gospel is the Savior hanging on a cross receiving the punishment of our sins so that we could experience his grace.

Read Isaiah 53:5-6. How does this passage describe what God did to his son? And what were the results?

The glorious message of the gospel is so amazing that it will provide Christians with endless treasures to explore. Let's look at two:

1. Forgiveness of sin

When we place our full trust in Jesus and his death on the cross, we are forgiven of all our sin, and we enter into a world of blessing and grace. Here are just some of the metaphors that the Bible uses to describe the amazing benefits of the gospel.

- We are **justified**. We are no longer condemned but are declared innocent in God's court of law (Titus 3:7).
- We are **adopted**. We are no longer orphans but are adopted into God's family (Romans 8:15).
- We are **reconciled**. We are no longer estranged but are forgiven and brought into a relationship with God (2 Cor. 5:18-20).
- We are **washed**. We are no longer dirty but have been cleansed of our sin (Ephesians 1:7).
- We are **redeemed**. We are no longer enslaved. Our ransom has been paid and we have been redeemed from the slave market (Galatians 5:1).

- We are **purchased**. We are no longer in debt but are set free (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Which of these images most resonates with you? Why?

The one overarching term that connects all of these benefits is “union with Christ.” It means that through the death of Jesus on the cross, we are united to him by faith. We’re joined to Jesus, and all the benefits and blessings that belong to Jesus now also, amazingly, belong to us.

Read John 15:4-6. What does this verse tell us about our new relationship with God?

2. Freedom from sin

Not only does the gospel provide forgiveness of our sin, it empowers us to overcome our sin. This can be confusing for new Christians. If good works don’t save us, are they unimportant? The answer is that good works don’t save us, but they do prove that we are saved. When the gospel breaks into our lives and saves us, it also empowers us to change and to follow God’s commands with joy and power.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. What role does grace play in our new lives? What role do works play?

Dane Ortlund explains it this way: “But the way sanctifying growth takes place is not, in essence, by redoubling moral efforts, writing out new resolutions and intensifying spiritual discipline. The fundamental means of change is a deeper and deeper reflection on the very gospel that rescued us in the first place.

How can reflecting on the gospel change us? What does God’s deep love and delight in us have to do with our growth in godliness?

One of the ways we grow is by walking in the light. 1 John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Walking in the light means acknowledging our sins and failures to other Christians. This seems like the last thing that we would want to do, but sins grow in the darkness. When they are brought into the light, they wither.

Do you have a Christian friend who you can walk in the light with? What would this look like for you?

Book Recommendation: Living the Cross Centered Life (C.J. MAHANEY)

STUDY 2

The Importance of the Bible

It's easy to view the Bible as a boring, outdated book that is full of old-fashioned rules and regulations but the Bible is the most important and powerful book in the world. Its pages reveal God and the good news of the gospel and show us how to respond to him. The Bible is authored by God himself, who inspired human people to write down his words, and these words have the power to change us. Hebrews 4:12 says that it is "living and active," and 2 Timothy 3:16 says that it is "breathed out by God."

In a few words, how would you describe your idea or experience of the Bible?

Although the Bible can look imposing, understanding a few basics can help a lot. The Bible is divided into two parts called testaments. The Old Testament begins with the creation of the world and man and our terrible fall into sin. As it continues, we follow the people of Israel as they continually turn away from God and instead worship false gods and idols like the cultures around them. In his mercy and kindness, God sends prophets (men who speak the words of God), who continually exhort the people to turn back to God. The entire Old Testament with all its ceremonies and sacrifices points forward to the coming of Christ who would rescue us from our sin and brokenness.

The New Testament starts with the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which chronicle the life and death of Jesus from four different perspectives. Then the book of Acts describes the start of the early church. The rest of the New Testament contains letters written to strengthen and instruct the young churches. The entire New Testament explains how Jesus' sacrifice purchased salvation for all, empowers us to change, and equips us for fellowship and evangelism.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16. What does this verse tell us about the accuracy and authority of the Bible? How should the Bible's authority affect how you live?

Learning to read and understand the Bible is a lifelong adventure and worth all the effort we give to it. Some simple tools that can help us along the way. Let's learn to use some of these tools in the passages below.

1. The purpose tool

Because God spoke through many different human authors, it is helpful to know why they were writing and what they were trying to accomplish. When looking at a passage of the Bible, consider reading the introduction to that book to find out:

- Who is writing this book of the Bible and who is he writing it to?
- Why is he writing this?
- Are there any problems he is trying to address?

Read John 20:30-31. Who is the author of this passage? Why is he writing this book?

2. The context tool

Like most books, the Bible has characters, plots, themes, and lessons. It would be confusing to just turn to any page of a book and expect to understand what's happening. That's why we need to understand the

context – how what we are reading fits into the larger story. Let's look at an example:

Read Philippians 4:13. By reading this verse out of context, what are some things we might wrongly assume this verse is saying?

Now read Philippians 4:12-13. With the context provided, what is "I can do all things" referring to? How can this verse help us in the situations we face?

3. The repetition tool

The biblical writers often repeat words to get us to notice a main point.

Read 1 John 3:16-18 below.

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

Given the repeated words, what do you think this scripture is trying to say to us?

4. The application tool

James 1:22 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." What that means is that it's not enough to just read the Bible; we need to apply it to our lives. Sometimes the Bible tells us that we need to stop doing something, and sometimes it tells us to start doing something. Other times, we're called not to do, but to believe something.

Read James 5:7-11 below. As you read, circle the things James is exhorting us to do.

"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."

What are the things God is calling us to in this passage?

What are some of the motivations for this kind of obedience?

Let's do one last exercise to practice using our four tools together:

Read Ephesians 6:10-20 below, and try to use all the tools we learned about to understand this passage. Try to figure out the context and purpose of the passage. Look at words that are repeated and decide how it applies to your life.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

What is the context?

What is the purpose?

What words are repeated?

How does this apply to your life?

Book Recommendation: Dig Deeper (BEYNON AND SACH)

STUDY 3

The Importance of Prayer

One of the greatest privileges in the life of a Christian is the opportunity to talk with our Father in heaven, the one who created us, loves us, and gave his Son to reconcile us to himself. Yet prayer can at times be difficult. We can wonder whether it's accomplishing anything or whether God really hears us. Despite our feelings, the Bible teaches that in prayer we get to know God, communicate our dependence on God, and bring our burdens and needs to God. Psalm 16:11 says, "In your [God's] presence is fullness of joy."

In a few words, how would you describe your idea or experience of prayer?

When it comes to approaching God in prayer, we can feel intimidated, like we have to follow certain rules and procedures to speak to God. But prayer isn't a formal duty, it's simply coming to God and communicating with Him. In prayer we shouldn't focus on the words we use, but on God himself. How do we do this?

1. Come like a child.

Read Mark 10:14-15. How should these verses inform the way we approach God?

What are some of the ways children communicate, and how is this different from how we normally think about prayer?

2. Bring him your burdens.

Read Romans 8:37-39. How does God's permanent love and acceptance allow us to come to him openly and honestly?

Read Matthew 11:28-30. Who does Jesus invite to come to him? Why does Jesus invite these kinds of people? (Think about how Jesus describes his heart in this passage.) What is the result of giving your burdens to the Lord?

Read Philippians 4:6-7. According to this passage, what are we to do with the things that make us anxious? And what is the result?

3. Repent to Him.

When we think of repentance, we can think of groveling before an intolerant judge, but repentance is a gift from God. It allows us to turn from our sins and confess them to a benevolent and gracious Father who is eager to forgive and restore us.

Read 1 John 1:9. What are some of the benefits of confession and repentance?

Sometimes our prayers aren't answered in the way or the timing that we hope they will be. That can be hard, but we can be sure that our Heavenly Father knows what is best for his children and will give us what is ultimately best. He is worthy of our continued trust.

4. Thank and praise Him.

Read Psalm 100:1-5. What are we commanded to do in this Psalm and why?

These passages show us that in Christ, we can bring our joys and sorrows, requests and burdens, praises and confessions to our Father in heaven and know that we are heard and loved.

Book Recommendation: A Praying Life (PAUL MILLER)

STUDY 4

The Importance of the Church

We all have different church experiences. Some of us loved it, some liked it but didn't quite get the point, some thought it was boring and irrelevant, some never attended at all, and sadly, some have even endured abuses there. In this lesson, we'll lay aside our past experiences and consider God's purpose and passion for his beloved church.

In a few words, how would you describe your idea or experience of church?

Hebrews 10:25 warns us to, "not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day [the return of Christ] drawing near."

But why should we meet together at church? Is it so pastors can pressure us to give money or so that we can bring back a more traditional, 1950s way of life? No, it's to gather together as the people of God and celebrate the One who rescued us, loves us, and wants to meet with us in real ways.

1. God Loves His Church

The church isn't a manmade institution; it's something that God himself created and loves.

Read Acts 20:28 where Paul is addressing some pastors in a city called Ephesus. How does Paul describe the church and how does he say God "obtained" it?

As we grow in our love for Christ, we will love the things he loves. Attending a local church puts us right in the middle of God's will for us and positions us to know him better.

2. God Uses the Church

After Jesus died, rose, and ascended to heaven, the early church was born.

Read Acts 2:42-47. List some of the things the early church was devoted to. Where do you see these activities being expressed in your church (verse 42)? Why do you think these activities are so important?

What was the effect of the early church on those around them? How were people's lives changed? (verses 43-47)

God wants us to experience his presence and power just like the early church did. Hearing God's Word preached each week equips us to understand and apply his ways throughout the week as our forgetful souls are bombarded with lies and temptations. Worshiping with his people reminds us that we are not alone and that God is worthy of our praise in every area of life. Praying together as a church reinforces to us that God is a loving Father who cares about our big and small trials and that we have brothers and sisters in Christ who care for us.

God's church changes us, week by week, into the people he created us to be, and it's worth the sacrifice it takes to get there. Tony Payne, in his book *How to Walk into Church*, says of the Sunday gathering: "One of the most important acts of love and encouragement we can all engage in is the powerful encouragement of just being there—because every time

I walk into church, I am wearing a metaphorical t-shirt that says, 'God is important to me, and you are important to me.' And on the back it says, 'And that's why I wouldn't dream of missing this.' Similarly, when we stay away for no good reason, we send the opposite message. None of the important things God has for us to do in church each week can happen if we're not there. We can't love people; we can't talk to them and encourage them; we can't gather with them to listen together to God's Word. All of this hangs on the rather simple prerequisite of actually being there."

What are some reasons you might be tempted to skip church?

3. God Equips the Church

Coming to church isn't just about what we can get but what we can give. We follow a Savior who gave his life for us, and using our gifts for the good of others not only honors God and helps them, but changes us as well.

Read Romans 12:4-8. How would you summarize Paul's main point in this passage? What are some ways the gifts that are listed can build up the church?

What gifts do you have (in this list or otherwise) that God may want you to use in the church?

Many graduates of the Bridge Course are excited about what they've learned about God and the Christian faith. They understand the gospel better, they've met new friends, and they want to continue to grow and learn. What is the difference between those who go on to thrive in their faith and those who don't? More often than not, it's their commitment to gather with the people of God.

Despite what the world teaches, we need each other. We need pastors to teach us the truths of God. We need brothers and sisters in Christ to pray for and encourage us. We need godly instruction for work and marriage and parenting and trials. We need the sound of voices raised in song when our own hearts feel weary. Let's prioritize the most important place on earth.

What is one step you could take in prioritizing involvement in the life of the church?

Book Recommendation: Rediscover Church (HANSEN AND LEEMAN)

BONUS STUDIES

Many Bridge study groups want to keep going, so what follows are two extra studies you can do together or on your own.

STUDY 5

The Importance of Trusting God

We might wrongly assume that when we become Christians, all our problems will go away. But Jesus tells us that those who follow him will encounter trials and hardships (James 1:2, 2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus himself faced all kinds of difficulties in his short time on earth, and he trusted his Father through them all, even as he endured the brutality of the cross.

Jesus calls his followers to take their cross and follow him (Luke 9:23). That means things are not always going to be easy. We need to remember that at the center of Christianity is a Savior hanging on the cross. But the good news is that even when we face difficult situations, we are never alone. God gives us his Spirit, his Word, and his people to comfort and guide us through the challenges of this life.

What are some trials you have recently experienced? Are there ways you've been able to trust God through them?

How can we grow in trusting God in the midst of life's challenges and difficulties?

1. Remember that God is in control.

God is in absolute control of everything. The term often used to describe this is the sovereignty of God. It means that God has the power, wisdom, and authority to do all that he decides to do. Our universe operates moment by moment under his power and wisdom. This doesn't mean that God commits evil; all evil is attributed to sinful man and the devil. But it does mean that God is in control of all things. Although there is more to be said about God's sovereignty, this attribute brings Christians

great comfort as they rest in the hands of a capable and wise Father.

Read Isaiah 46:9-10. What does this verse tell us about God? What effect should this have on us?

Read Romans 8:28-29. Why do you think this verse is considered one of the most comforting in the Bible? How does it specifically comfort you?

2. Remember that God is loving.

God is not only powerful and sovereign (after all, an evil dictator could have those traits.) The Bible assures us that God is also supremely loving. He uses his sovereign control for his glory and also for the good of his people. It can be difficult to believe that in the middle of painful circumstances, but God's promises are true and we can trust that he is at work even when we can't see it.

Read Ephesians 2:4-7. List some of the ways that this passage describes God's love for us.

Read Hebrews 12:5-11. In what ways is God's discipline loving? How does your adoption as sons and daughters change the way you think about trials and suffering?

3. Remember that God has blessed us.

One of the ways we grow in trusting God is to be more aware of the blessing of salvation than the presence of our troubles. When we realize that we deserve eternal punishment but instead have been adopted into God's family, we should be the most thankful people on earth! Even in the midst of pain, our hearts can be filled with gratefulness and joy because of all that God has done for us.

List some of the things you are grateful that God has done for you. Are you more aware of God's blessings or your trials? How can you turn that around?

Read Habakkuk 3:17-18. Despite the terrible trials that are coming upon the people of Israel because of their disobedience, how is Habakkuk able to say what he says? How can this passage help you as you navigate through your own trials?

Book Recommendation: Walking with God through Pain and Suffering
(TIM KELLER)

STUDY 6

The Importance of Telling Others

We've spent time in these studies exploring all that God has done for us. When our hearts are full of gratitude, we should naturally want to share the good news with others. Imagine winning the lottery or having a long awaited child and not telling anyone! But too often, we allow fear to keep us from sharing the good news. We fear rejection from friends and critique from family. With growing opposition to the Christian faith, it's often easier and safer to keep the message of the gospel to ourselves. But what if no one took a risk and explained the gospel to us? What if the early church decided to keep this life-changing message to themselves?

1. Why should we tell others?

The main reason we should tell others about Jesus is that he commands us to. It's not just a job for people who are bold or extroverted. The Lord calls all of his followers to help others become followers of Christ, but we can't do it in our own strength. The gospel is powerful, and its unstoppable message has transformed the lives of millions of people. Let's look at the last recorded words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel.

Read Matthew 28:18-20. What are the marching orders that Jesus gives to the disciples and ultimately to us? What are some ways that we can fulfill these "orders"?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. According to this passage, what is God seeking to do for the world and how does he do it? What role are we called to play in all of this?

2. How do we tell others?

The first thing we need to do is to live a faithful Christian life that is distinct from the world around us. It doesn't mean we will be perfect but that people should see the light of the gospel in our lives. One of the best ways to reach people with the gospel is through genuine friendship. Jesus was called the "friend of sinners" (Matthew 11:19) and we should be called the same.

Read Luke 19:1-10. Even though everyone hated Zacchaeus because he was a tax collector, what are some of the things that Jesus did to befriend him? What are some of the things that we can do to befriend those God has placed in our lives?

We can assume that we need a particular personality to reach people with the gospel, but that isn't true. God wants to use each of us with our distinct strengths and weaknesses to share his good news. Evangelism will not look the same for everyone. In the book of Acts God works through people who are bold and people who are quiet. He uses those who are in the limelight and those who serve behind the scenes. No one is disqualified.

What are some of your strengths, abilities, and interests? How can you use those to reach others?

Read Acts 1:8. What important role does the Holy Spirit play in spreading the gospel?

One tool that can help you explain the gospel is the “How Good are You?” booklet. Do you remember how this booklet guided us each week through the Bridge Course? It also works to tell others about Jesus. You can sit down with someone and simply read the booklet to them. No experience is necessary. Consider trying this with someone God has placed in your life. Who might that be?

We hope this study has helped you in your walk with Christ. Remember that we aren't meant to walk the Christian life alone, so keep attending church. In addition, it is critical that you read your Bible, pray and keep reminding yourself of the glorious truths of the Gospel.

Book Recommendation: Learning Evangelism from Jesus (BARRS)



COVENANT
FELLOWSHIP
— church —

Covenant Fellowship Church
One Fellowship Drive
Glen Mills, PA 19342
610.361.0606

www.covfel.org